

Alumni Satisfaction and Experiences

Three Years After Graduation

*A Report on the Survey of 1995-96 Mason Alumni
Surveyed Spring 1999*

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I.

Highlights

Educational Satisfaction

- Satisfaction (those "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied") rose among Mason alumni surveyed in 1999 as compared to those surveyed in 1997.
- Satisfaction with educational quality rose from 88% to 93%.
- Advising satisfaction rose from 45% to 56%.
- Satisfaction with course availability rose from 61% to 82%.

Working Since Graduation

- 81% of alumni were working full time, another 10% part time.
- 71% of alumni said their major was related to their current or most recent occupation.
- 78% said their major prepared them for responsible citizenship.

Educational History Since Graduation

- 13% of alumni have completed a degree or certificate since graduating from Mason in 1995-96;
- 25% have completed or sought Master's degrees.
- 77% said their graduate major was related ("very much" or "somewhat") to their undergraduate major.
- 87% said their undergraduate major prepared them ("very much" or "somewhat") for graduate study.

Coming Back to Mason

- 71% of alumni live in Northern Virginia, a percentage similar to previous alumni reports.
- 62% of alumni had been back to campus since graduation. Asked what would bring them back to campus, 45% said

- professional development seminars, 43% career networking opportunities and 28% said a sporting event.
 - Alumni were most likely to say they would serve Mason by assisting an academic department (n=80) and career mentoring (n=74).
-

II. Background and Introduction

The Office of Institutional Assessment (OIA) at George Mason University surveys undergraduate alumni every two years. For the second time, all public four-year colleges and universities in Virginia surveyed the same cohort of graduates who were approximately three years past graduation. (Comparative data are not available as of this printing.) The impetus for such an effort comes from the [State Council of Higher Education for Virginia \(SCHEV\)](#), which, along with Virginia assessment professionals, created ten questions to be placed on all surveys of alumni. These questions focus on three primary areas: educational satisfaction, post-graduation employment, and post-baccalaureate educational experiences. A list of the ten statewide items is in Appendix C of this report. The complete George Mason survey can be found in Appendix B.

III. George Mason's Alumni Survey Process & Response Rates

In the Past

In the past, in order to be able to provide departmental- and program-level data, an entire alumni population cohort was surveyed. This resulted in multiple mailings to more than 2,000 alumni. Response rates achieved from two mailings of the survey and one postcard reminder were 39% (1992 survey), 44% (1995 survey), and 35% (1997 survey). While these response rates are typical of alumni research at higher education institutions across the United States, we wanted to do better.

This Year

For the 1999 survey several changes were made. The survey was kept short, only 16 questions in length. Further, instead of surveying the entire population, a random sample of 704 alumni was drawn from those alumni who graduated in the summer and fall of 1995 and in spring of 1996. The survey process consisted of an initial postcard mailing in mid- spring 1999 alerting alumni of the upcoming mailing and allowing for changes and corrections to addresses. A survey was then mailed, followed by a reminder postcard and two more survey mailings. The initial postcard and third mailing of the survey itself had not been previously attempted with full population studies due to the time and costs of such efforts when surveying large numbers of alumni.

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents Compared to Graduating Population*

Alumni Respondents	%	Fall & Spring '95 and Summer '96 %
Ethnicity		
African American	4	6
Asian American	12	14
Hispanic American	4	5
Native American	<1	<1
White American	77	72
Other/Unknown	30	2
Sex**		
Female	70	60
Male	30	40
Age		
<23	17	18
23-24	28	31
25-27	20	20
28-30	7	9
31-34	9	7
35+	20	16
Degree		
BA	44	46
BAIS	<1	<1
BFA	<1	<1
BIS	5	3
BM	<1	1
BS	38	40
BSED	1	1
BSN	11	9
Semester of Graduation		
Summer '95	18	21
Fall '95	31	28
Spring '96	51	51

*Totals do not always sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Significant difference found at $p < .001$.

Our efforts to increase response rates were successful. A total of 366 surveys were returned, 46 were categorized as undeliverable and eight arrived too late to be included in the results of this study. In all, a response rate of 56% was achieved. Table 1 (above), comparing the characteristics of survey respondents to our full population of graduates, reveals the representativeness of respondents compared to the full alumni population except with respect to sex. Women, as is often the case with survey research, are overrepresented among respondents (70%) when compared to their proportion in the population (60%) ($p < .001$).

This sample survey approach and additional mailings were so successful that they will likely be repeated in the future. The primary limitation of this approach is our inability to provide departmental and program level information. Finally, this report begins with reported increases in satisfaction ratings among 1999-surveyed alumni ('95-'96 graduates) compared to 1997-surveyed alumni ('93-'94 graduates). There are two possible explanations for these findings. First, the later graduates might

indeed be more satisfied. However, an alternate explanation is that the later survey results are more valid (as a result of increased response rates) and the 1999 data may better reflect the true satisfaction of graduates.

IV. Satisfaction Rises Among the 1995-96 Graduates

The State Council for Higher Education in Virginia prompts colleges and universities to ask about satisfaction on campuses in three areas: educational quality, advising and course availability. These questions were first asked on the Mason 1997 alumni survey of the 1993-94 graduates. Those Mason alumni were considerably less satisfied than alumni of other four-year institutions in the state. However, the 1999-surveyed alumni (graduates of 1995-96) report higher satisfaction in all three areas compared to the earlier cohort. Those findings are presented below.

Satisfaction with Educational Quality

A majority of alumni (55%) reported being "very satisfied" with the educational quality at Mason. Another 38% were "somewhat satisfied."

One student wrote, "I do feel the quality of education I received was/is very high, it just doesn't relate to a job in [the field where] I'm currently employed."

A student who was less satisfied commented, "The academic program was good but there was a lack of cohesiveness between classes in my major. This [more cohesiveness] would help students to better understand how all the information studied ties together."

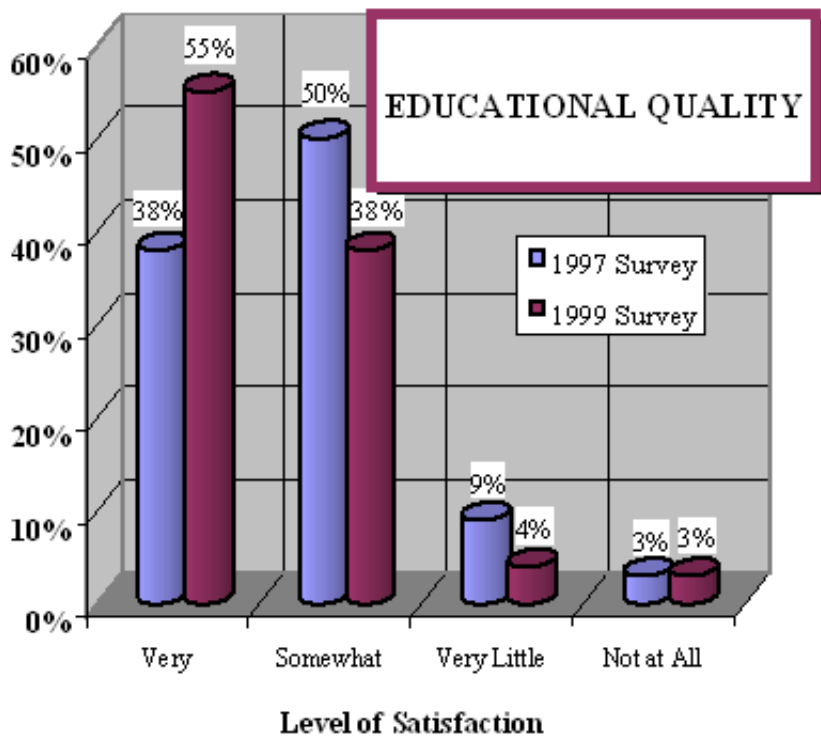


Figure 1
Percentages of Responses by Satisfaction with Educational Quality at Mason Results from 1997 and 1999 Alumni Surveys

Satisfaction with Advising

A majority of alumni (56%) surveyed in 1999 reported being satisfied (19% "very" and 37% "somewhat") with advising at Mason. Among those surveyed in 1997, less than half (45%) reported satisfaction with advising. Further, one quarter of 1997 alumni reported being "not at all satisfied" with advising. However, this proportion dropped to 12% for the 1999 survey sample.

Some of the 1999-surveyed alumni had specific suggestions for improving advising. One student said, "...I suggest that there be large mandatory meetings during the freshman year for all students and advisors . . . followed with smaller meetings with an advisor and his/her particular students. There needs to be a relationship established between students and teachers or advisors. I believe my performance in college would have been better if I had this support."

Another said, "... I think that because the advisors were professors, they really didn't have the ability to fully/professionally counsel students. I believe that the department and students would be better served if academic advisors were full time, professional staff member that were not involved in teaching."

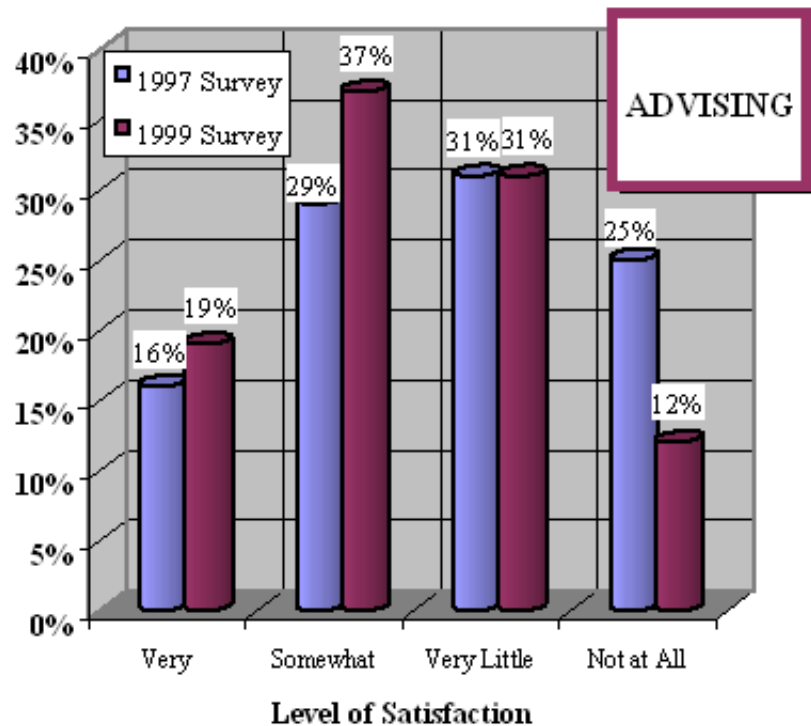


Figure 2

*Percentages of Responses
by Satisfaction with Advising at
Mason
Results from 1997 and 1999
Alumni Surveys**

*Totals do not always sum to 100% due
to rounding.

Satisfaction with Course Availability

Eighty-two percent of 1999-surveyed alumni report being satisfied (either "very" [29%] or "somewhat" [53%]) with course

availability at Mason. Among those surveyed in 1997, only 61% were similarly satisfied. One former student from the 1999 survey who reported little satisfaction with course availability said, "... Courses I was required to take for a certain semester would overlap each other time wise. This happened quite often so that each semester I'd be lucky if I could get just two classes that I wanted." Another wrote, "I couldn't take the major I wanted to because the courses weren't offered at night. As I came closer to graduation, I also had trouble getting the courses I needed."

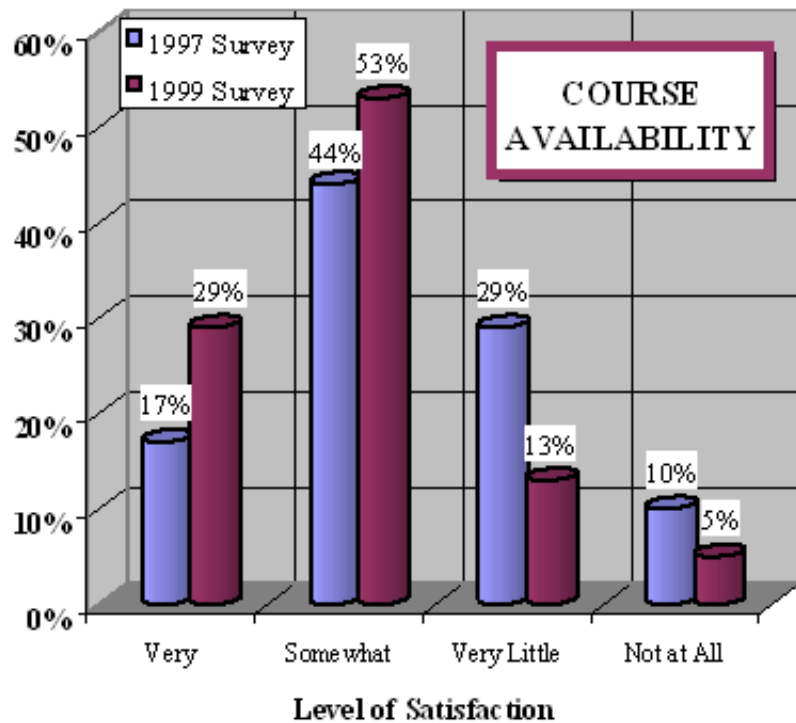


Figure 3
*Percentages of Responses
 by Satisfaction with Course
 Availability at Mason
 Results from 1997 and 1999
 Surveys*

V. Employment Information

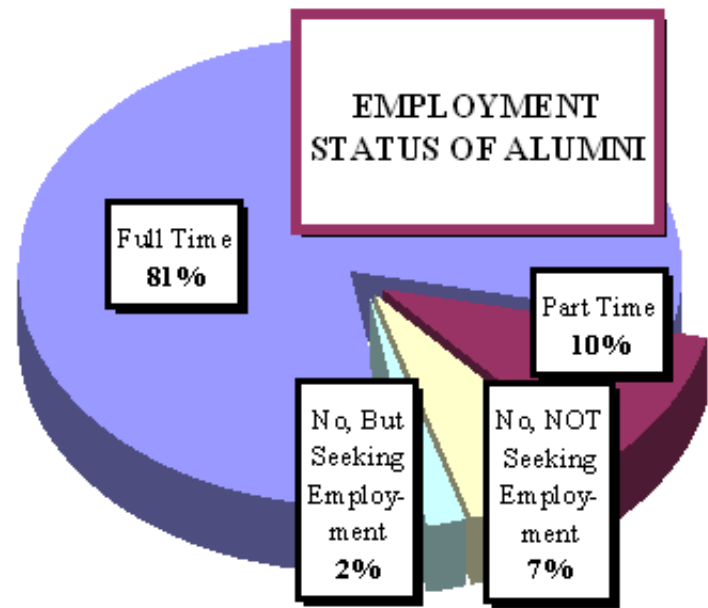
Approximately four fifths of alumni (81%) were employed full time at the time of the survey. Another 10% were employed part time. Only 2% of the unemployed alumni (9% of all respondents) were actively seeking employment. The proportions of full- and part-time employed alumni are identical to those reported by Mason alumni who were surveyed in 1997.

Relationship Between Major and Occupation

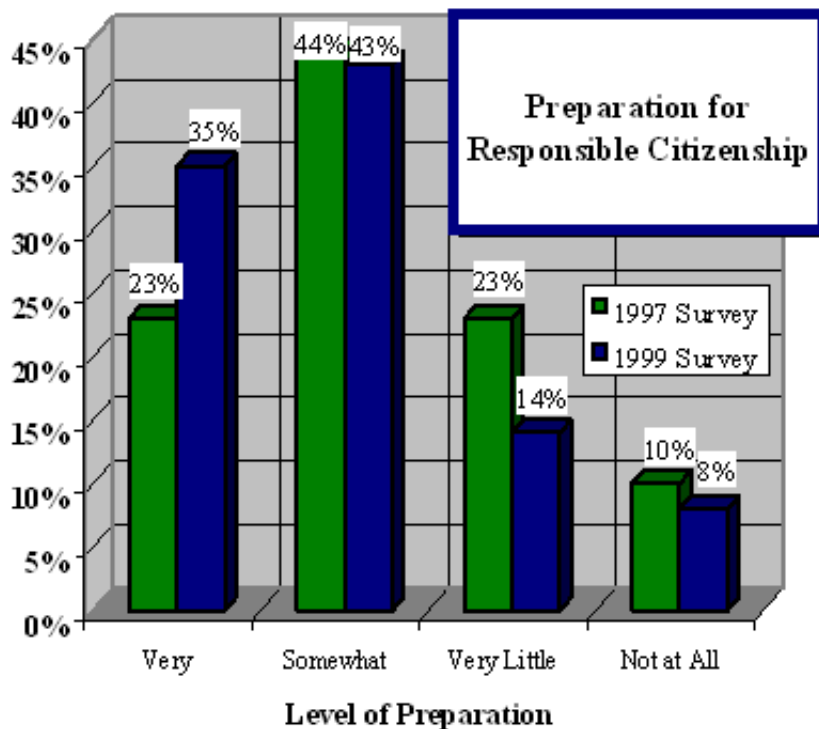
Forty-seven percent of 1999-surveyed alumni said that their GMU major was related "very much" to their current or most recent occupation. This is higher than the 43% of 1997-surveyed alumni who said their major was "very much" related to their current occupation. While almost one quarter of the 1999 alumni (24%) indicated their major was "somewhat related" to their occupation, 38% of the 1997 alumni responded similarly. Similar proportions of 1999- and 1997-surveyed alumni (79% of 1995-96 graduates and 80% of 1993-94 graduates), said their major helped them "very much" or "somewhat" perform in the workplace. Of those 1999-surveyed alumni

who said their major was related to their occupation, 93% said their major helped them perform in the workplace "very much" (59%) or "somewhat" (34%). Seventeen of the twenty alumni who said their major was "not helpful" in the workplace were in occupations "not related" to their major.

Figure 4
Employment Status of Alumni



VI. Preparing Alumni for Responsible Citizenship



Over three quarters (78%) of alumni said that their major prepared them "very much" or "somewhat" for responsible citizenship. Among the 1997 survey population, only two thirds (67%) said they were prepared for responsible citizenship.

Figure 5
Preparation for Responsible Citizenship
Results from 1997 and 1999 Alumni Surveys

VII. Educational Experiences Since Graduation

To better understand alumni educational experiences since graduation, information was gathered on the proportion of 1995-96 alumni who had pursued graduate studies, were currently enrolled in study at the time of the survey and had completed study. Specifically, 42% of alumni had pursued graduate study since graduating from Mason in 1995-96 and 21% were enrolled at the time of the survey (spring 1999).

Degrees Completed by Mason Alumni

Thirteen percent of alumni had completed a graduate degree or certificate since graduating from Mason in 1995-96. Specifically, 25% of graduates (n=91) had completed or are currently pursuing master's degrees (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., M.Ed., etc.), 4.5% (n=16) had completed or are pursuing professional degrees (law, medicine, etc.), 1% (n=4) doctoral degrees (Ph.D., D.B.A., Ed.D., etc.) and 2% (n=6) had completed or are pursuing some "other" degree or certification. These figures represent an improvement over the last alumni survey. Among '93-'94 graduates, 11% had completed a graduate degree or certificate since graduating three years earlier.

Relationship of Undergraduate Major to Graduate Study

When pursuing graduate school, alumni can continue in a field related to their academic major or change fields to be able to pursue study and ultimately, employment in a new area. Overall, 78% of alumni indicated that their undergraduate major was "very much" (55%) or "somewhat" (23%) related to their undergraduate major. Eight percent said there was "very little" relationship and 14% said their undergraduate major was "not at all" related to their graduate degree.

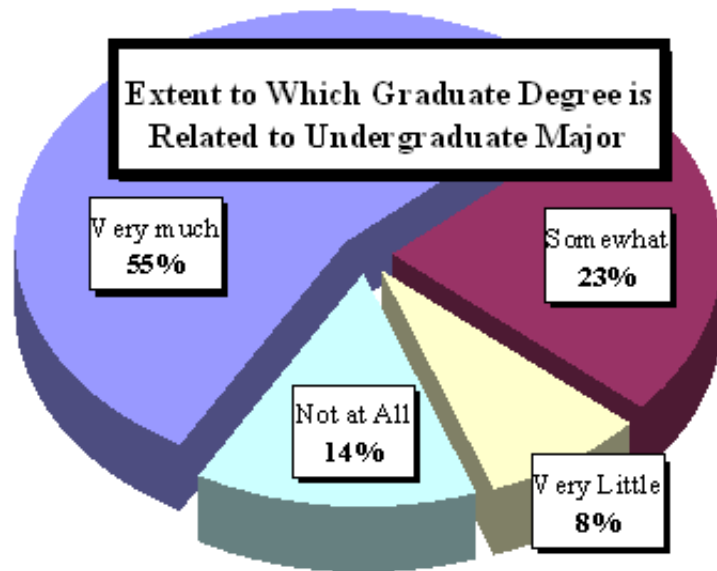


Figure 6
*Extent to Which Graduate Degree
is
Related to Undergraduate Major*

How Prepared for Graduate Study were Alumni?

Alumni were asked the extent to which their undergraduate major prepared them for graduate study. Overall, 44% said their undergraduate major prepared them "very much," while 35% said "somewhat." Among the 1997-surveyed alumni, 40% said "very much" and 45% said "somewhat." Among alumni who said their graduate study was "very much" related to their undergraduate major, the proportion who say they were "very much" prepared rose to 79% and those "somewhat" prepared to 20%. Among alumni who said their graduate study was "not at all" related to their undergraduate major, 22% still felt "somewhat" prepared, while 24% only felt a "little" prepared.

VIII. Where Alumni Live

Consistently over time, about three quarters of alumni report living in Northern Virginia. Specifically, of the 1995-96 graduates 71% reside in the Northern Virginia area, while another 10% live in "other Virginia" locations. The remaining alumni live primarily in other parts of the United States with 3% living in FL, 1% each in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Texas and Maryland, and less than one percent (.3%) in Washington, D.C.

Northern Virginia is defined as the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas/Manassas Park and the counties of

Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William.

IX. Coming Back to Campus

How Many Had Been Back to Campus Since Graduation?

Sixty-two percent of alumni had been back to campus since their graduation. An analysis was performed against the three areas of satisfaction (educational quality, advising, course availability) reported earlier in this report. No statistically significant differences were found in educational satisfaction between alumni who had and had not returned to GMU since graduation.

Reasons Alumni Might Come Back to Campus

Alumni were presented with a list of six activities that might be a draw to bring them back to the campus. The highest number and proportion of alumni said that professional development seminars (n=160, 45% of alumni) and career networking opportunities (n=155, 43% of alumni) would bring them back to campus. Others thought they would come back for a sporting event (n=99), to interact with classmates (n=66), for a faculty talk or lecture (n=51) and to interact with current students (n=48).

Table 2

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Percentage*</u>	<u>Number</u>
Professional development seminars	45%	160
Career networking opportunities	43%	155
Sporting event	28%	99
Interaction with classmates/alumni	18%	66
Faculty talk or lecture	14%	51
Interact with current students	13%	48

**Percentages total to more than 100% because respondents could indicate multiple activities.*

Other draws that would bring alumni back to campus include graduate or other course work (n=23), Center for the Arts performances (n=13), the library (n=6), social events (n=5) and athletic facilities (n=1).

X. Serving George Mason

In all, 142 of the 358 survey respondents (40%) said they would consider serving George Mason University.

Alumni were prompted to consider serving in four primary areas including career mentoring, student recruitment, assisting an academic department and "other". Alumni were most likely to say that they would like to serve by assisting in their academic department (n=80) and career mentoring (n=74). Forty-four wanted to help recruit students. Alumni had other ideas for getting involved and serving Mason including guest lecturing, teaching or tutoring (n=10), getting involved in sporting/coaching (n=3) or freshmen orientation/tours (n=2).

Geographic location of current residence was not significantly related to wanting to get involved and serve Mason. That is,

those who lived beyond the Northern Virginia area (other VA, MD, D.C. and other) were just as likely to want to serve Mason.

XI. APPENDICES

Appendix A	SAS Frequency Printout	AppxA-Freqs.pdf	(PDF: 15kb / 7 pages)
		AppxA-Freqs.doc	(Word 97: 46kb / 20 pages)
Appendix B	Copy of the 1999 Questionnaire	AppxB-Form.pdf	(PDF: 13kb / 1 page)
Appendix C	Questions Common to All University Alumni in Virginia	AppxC-Common.pdf	(PDF: 6 kb / 1 page)

Office of Institutional Assessment, July 1999

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